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COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO
Department of general services

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DUANE P. LEIB, DIRECTOR

DATE: JUNE 8, 2006

TO: PLANNING COMMISSION

FROM: JAN DI LEO, PARKS PLANNER

SUBJECT: PARKS AND RECREATION ELEMENT UPDATE - JOINT STUDY SESSION

SUMMARY

Today is a joint study session on the proposed update of the Parks and Recreation Element (PRE) of the County general plan. This study session will include the SLO County Planning Commission and SLO County Parks and Recreation Commission. The intent of this meeting is allow public input and a discussion between the two Commissions.

On July 13, 2006, the Planning Commission will conduct a public hearing for formal consideration of the PRE Update. A full staff report on the details of the update will be prepared for that agenda. Copies of the Planning Commission Review Draft PRE and the related Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) have already been distributed to you under a separate cover. At the June 8th workshop the Commissioners and the public may comment on both documents.

The PRE is an optional general plan element. It establishes goals, policies, and programs for the acquisition, development and maintenance of parks, recreation, and special places¹ owned or managed by County Parks. The Element is a major tool for guiding the acquisition, development and maintenance of parks and recreational facilities and programs.

¹ Per the PRE, *special places* are defined as natural areas, coastal access, and historic resources. The PRE also makes a distinction between *parks* and *natural areas*. See Chapter 7 for definitions.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

No action is to be taken today as this matter is a study session preceding the public hearing to be held at your July 13th meeting. As a result, staff recommends:

1. Hold the study session,
2. Receive the initial staff presentation
3. Receive public comment on the PRE and DEIR
4. Discussion between the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) and the Planning Commission (PC)

DISCUSSION

Previous Efforts: In 1995 County Parks held a series of workshops to help formulate a PRE. This input was the basis of a January 1996 *Parks Commission Review Draft PRE* which was distributed to the PRC for initial review. Public and PRC input resulted in a 1996 *Public Review Draft PRE*. After the release of the 1996 *Public Review Draft PRE*, Parks staff conducted additional workshops in order to obtain public input. Public and PRC comments regarding the 1996 Element indicated there was general support for the proposed projects; however, it was recommended the document be made easier to read as well as more streamlined.

After a period of dormancy, in the early 2000s the PRE Update was restarted with a private consultant, Crawford Multari & Clark Associates (CMCA). In November 2003, Parks released a second *Public Review Draft PRE*. The 2003 version rewrote and reorganized the 1996 edition in the attempt to make it more readable, easier to understand, and to provide updated information.

In 2004, Parks, CMCA staff, and members of the PRC attended community workshops countywide in order to obtain input on the revised Element. In late 2004 and early 2005, the PRC considered input from the public and reviewed the Element at a series of public hearings. As a result of public and PRC input, a 2006 *Planning Commission Review Draft PRE* was developed by CMCA and County Parks. This is the document before you today.

Purpose and approach of the update: The PRE Update consolidates and replaces the: (1) 1968 Recreation Element, (2) 1991 County Trails Plan, (3) 1992 Natural Areas Plan (portions),² (4) 1988 Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and (5) various other General Plan components.³ The update proposes goals, policies and implementation measures for acquiring, developing and maintaining parks, recreation and special places. CMCA prepared the March 2006 Element with input from the County's Parks and Recreation Commission, the County Trails Committee, County Parks, various departments and public agencies, and the general public.

Format and structure of the update: The first four chapters of the 2006 Element discuss the importance of parks, recreation and special places as well as providing relevant goals,

² The Agriculture and Open Space Element also addresses portions of the 1992 Natural Area Plan.

³ Various Area Plans as well as the Framework For Planning reference park and recreation projects and policies. Document conformity will be evaluated as part of the public hearing process.

objectives, and policies. Chapter 5 provides a mechanism for prioritizing and implementing park and recreation projects through a Decision Tree process. Chapter 6 discusses funding and maintenance, and Chapter 7 provides relevant definitions.

Appendix A provides a list of existing and proposed parks, recreational facilities and special places throughout the County. The folded PRE Map at the back of the document augments the project list and should be used in conjunction with Appendix A. The countywide portion of the PRE Map depicts most of the longer, proposed County trails. The community maps (such as Avila and Cambria) show existing and proposed projects within these unincorporated communities. Most proposed parks, large recreation facilities (such as a community center), and new natural areas are *not* shown on the PRE Map but are noted in Appendix A. This was done in order to maintain flexibility and better serve the individual communities. Since the PRE is a long-range document, over time opportunities may become available that are unknown today and/or opportunities available today may not be available over the life of the PRE.

Along the same lines, the PRE does not address individual recreation facilities within specific parks. For example, the PRE does not designate a skate park for any particular park. Instead, a master plan will be developed for each county owned or managed park, recreation site and natural area. The master plan process is much more community based, allowing for local surveys and community workshops. The intent of the PRE is to focus on the larger issues such as the types of future parks needed within a community while the master plan process implements specific park improvements such as the number of parking spaces, the number of horseshoe pits, etc. that an individual community needs in that particular park. It is also expected a park master plan would be updated more frequently than the PRE.

Various SLO County cities, community services districts, as well as state and federal agencies assisted County Parks by providing a list of their park and recreation sites as well as what these sites furnish. Obviously the list of existing facilities will easily become dated. The intent of Appendix A is to show existing opportunities and entities to the extent feasible thereby maximizing opportunities for joint use and/or shared opportunities.

The remainder of the Element consists of appendices B through F. Appendix B provides the California Recreational Use Statute. This statute protects private property owners who allow public access. Appendix C contains County trail development standards. Typical funding sources for parks and natural areas are listed in Appendix D. The rating criteria used by County Parks is in Appendix E. This criteria helps determine priority projects. A list of consolidated goals, objectives and policies are contained in Appendix F.

Major Issues to Date: During the workshops and PRC hearings, the majority of public comments addressed three issues: (1) protecting agriculture and private property rights, (2) uniform decision making, and (3) project funding. To address the first item, Parks and CMCA met with a group of agriculturalists and the Ag Commissioner's Office. Through this process, the Element's trail policies were revised. In addition, new, remote trails that would potentially be in the middle of agricultural lands and were unlikely to be developed in the next twenty years were proposed for removal from the project list (Appendix A). These trails are highlighted in yellow in the Planning Commission Review Draft PRE.

To address the concern that each community get their fair share of projects, CMCA and County Parks refined Chapter 5, The Decision Tree. The intent of Chapter 5 is to balance projects throughout the County versus simply responding to the "squeaky wheel". In terms of funding, Parks will continue to work with the various community advisory councils to determine each area's park and recreation priorities. In addition, Parks will continue to look at joint use opportunities and additional funding sources that address a project's long-term maintenance costs as well as the initial development or acquisition costs.

Regional scope of the update: The PRE primarily addresses acquiring, developing and maintaining parks, recreation and special places within SLO County's unincorporated areas. However, policies within the Element do encourage joint use agreements with cities, school districts, community services districts and similar entities if such agreements provide a net benefit to residents within the unincorporated area.

Environmental review for the update: A program-level Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) has been prepared by CMCA. The DEIR was distributed for public review on April 28, 2006. The review period for the DEIR ends on *June 16, 2006, 5:00 pm*.

At the July 13, 2006 public hearing a summary of the DEIR comments will be presented. The DEIR is to be considered at the public hearing in accordance with the applicable provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act. The EIR will be used by the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors during the decision making process for the adoption of the PRE update. The issues addressed in the DEIR include: consistency with locally adopted plans and policies; public services; hydrology and water quality; geology and seismicity; biological resources; cultural resources, and other issues. The DEIR also evaluates cumulative effects, growth inducement and alternatives to the proposed update.

Other agency involvement/public review: The agencies participating in the completion of the PRE include representatives from County Parks, the County Planning & Building Department, Agricultural Commissioner's Office, County Public Works Department, CDF/County Fire, State Parks, and various cities and community services districts. Both the November 2003 Public Review Draft and the March 2006 Planning Commission Hearing Draft PRE were widely noticed to affected local, state and federal agencies, all county community advisory committees and other interested groups and individuals. For ease of review, the documents were made available on County Parks web page (www.slocountyparks.org), at various libraries, free CDs were handed out and mailed to interested parties, and the Element is available at County Parks for review.

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